# Take a Break

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# Take a Break

by damnslippyplanet

Summary

Tumblr prompt: WILL TAKING HANNIBAL TO A HIGH SCHOOL REUNION AS HIS DATE

Me: I would write this in a hot second for the lulz if I could think of any plausible scenario where I buy that Will Graham would ever go to his high school reunion. All I've got right now is "S1 Will loses a bet with Bev." Which…shit, now I want to write it.

When will I learn? Not tonight, apparently. Sigh.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

# Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal regards Will as if he's considering his next statement, as if he hasn't been planning this conversation since stopping by the lab that morning to dose Beverly in the guise of treating the lab team to some leftover treats from the previous night's dinner party. "However, I do feel as your friend, if not your official therapist, that a change of scenery and a chance for social interaction with someone other than your coworkers would do you good. Even if you bring Jimmy along. How far away is this event, did you say?"

"I was actually sort of relieved. I mean, I felt rotten that Bev got sick. She sounded completely miserable on the phone. But I never wanted to go to this stupid thing in the first place."

"So you said last week. I'm not sure you should play cards with Beverly Katz anymore, Will." Hannibal sits back and watches Will pace and gesticulate, even more agitated than he'd been last week when they'd discussed Will's upcoming 20th reunion.

"You're telling me. She cheats. It's the only possible explanation, I should have won that hand. I'd never have taken that bet otherwise. High school was not my idea of a good time. Actually I went to two high schools. Didn't like either one much. But she seemed to find the idea of my having a past hilarious. And Price and Zeller were ganging up on me too."

"And you were all drinking when you accepted this unfortunate bet?"

"Yes. I'll admit we were very, very drunk. But still. She absolutely cheated. And made me agree to take her to my damn reunion as my date. So I was relieved - I thought I was off the hook if she's too sick to go. But now she's trying to make me take Jimmy instead. *Jimmy!*"

Hannibal offers a noncommittal "hmm" and pretends to consider Will's dilemma. "I understand that reunions can be uncomfortable. However, we did discuss last week the possibility that you might look at your reunion as a therapeutic exercise since you commited to going."

Will's face twists, an expression almost like a snarl, there and gone so quickly you'd miss it if you weren't attuned to the nuances of Will's expressions. Hannibal is very attuned to them. "I'm here having these conversations with you to figure out how to keep it together well enough to do my job. I'm not here to excavate my unhappy childhood. I'm pretty sure my geometry teacher is not the reason I keep waking up in the middle of the night in places I've never been."

“Most likely not. Although, wouldn’t it be nice if it were that easy?” Hannibal regards Will as if he’s considering his next statement, as if he hasn’t been planning this conversation since stopping by the lab that morning to dose Beverly in the guise of treating the lab team to some leftover treats from the previous night’s dinner party. “However, I do feel as your friend, if not your official therapist, that a change of scenery and a chance for social interaction with someone other than your coworkers would do you good. Even if you bring Jimmy along. How far away is this event, did you say?”

“Not far from Annapolis. We lived out that way for my senior year; we’d moved up from North Carolina summer after my junior year. Which, by the way, is another reason the whole idea is ridiculous. I only went to that school for a year, there’s barely anything to remember.”

Hannibal ignores that altogether. “So, an easy enough trip. You could take a break. A brief diversion from chasing nightmares for Jack. It might be beneficial for you to spend an evening of relative normality.”

“It would have been bad enough going with Bev. Jimmy will be completely impossible. His road trip music alone is enough to drive a person even crazier than I already am. Have you ever been in a car with him?”

Hannibal smiles and gets an odd look from Will; perhaps that smile was a bit too predatory. “I can’t say that I have. But if that’s your concern, Will, I could see my way clear to accompanying you if you’ll accept a last-minute substitution. I have no pressing plans for this weekend and if you should find you do have some childhood demons to unearth, it might be useful to have me along to discuss them with. I also have excellent taste in driving music.”

Will arches an eyebrow. “You’re offering yourself as my date to a high school reunion I don’t even want to go to?”

“I’m simply offering to accompany you to an event that you seem to feel trepidation about attending. And which I believe it might do you some good to attend. Also, you might be better off choosing your own company than letting Beverly select it for you. I’m somewhat less likely to end up dancing on tables at your reunion than Jimmy.”

Will’s eyes go a little wide as he processes that mental image. “Okay. Good point.” He’s pacing again. The idea of returning to the site of even a year of his early life doesn’t seem to sit well. Hannibal would very much like to know more about that, about what happens early on in life to make someone develop the rare qualities of a Will Graham. He’s fairly determined to find out whether any clues to that might be unearthed at this event, even if he has to take Jimmy out of commission too, although that would be inelegant at best.

“Why don’t you think it over? Talk to Beverly and see if my company would satisfy the terms of your bet.”

Will rolls his eyes at that. “I guarantee you she’d go for it. She’ll find the idea completely hilarious. She’ll probably insist on photographic evidence, though. She may make us call her from the reunion to prove we’re there.”

“I think I can survive that. In fact, if you promise not to tell Ms. Katz that I colluded with you to circumvent her bet, we could walk in, gather some photographic evidence, and then immediately depart. I’ll keep the secret if you will.” Hannibal glances at the clock. “Our time is up. Why don’t you sleep on it and let me know in the morning what you’ve decided? It’s a short enough trip, I would be happy to come with you and put in an appearance if that would satisfy the terms of your wager.”

Will looks over at the clock, a little lost the way he always seems to be at the end of the hour as if it comes too soon. It’s Hannibal’s favorite part of their sessions, that moment when Will’s not ready to leave.

After a moment Will shrugs and reaches for his jacket. “I’m not going to lie, I think the evening’s less likely to end badly if you’re my company than if I let Bev send Jimmy with me. You’re sure you don’t mind? It doesn’t cross some weird ethical line in the sand?”

“I’m not your therapist, Will. I’m your friend. We’re just talking, and we can talk on the road as well as in my office. No ethical quandaries.” Any lines in the sand that there ever were, have long since blown away. Will just hasn't figured that out yet. Hannibal doesn’t intend for him to figure it out anytime soon.

“All right. Let me talk to Bev in the morning and see if she’s feeling well enough to come along on this godforsaken trip with me, or if she’ll let me out of the deal altogether. If I can’t wiggle out of it, I’ll let you know first thing.”

“I’ll await your call.”

Hannibal walks Will to the private client exit, shuts the door behind him, and packs up his things efficiently before turning out the lights and going to his car.

He’ll fill up the tank on the way home, and pack a small overnight bag. Just in case it’s needed. Hard to say what might happen when Will comes face to face with his past. If nothing else, it ought to make for an interesting evening.

# Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> It's not until the words are out of his mouth that Will realizes he was in such a hurry to keep the topic away from himself that it came out badly, some weird combination of awkwardness and unintended flirtation.
>
> He slinks down lower in seat and wishes briefly for death, a sinkhole to swallow him up, a meteor hurtling from the sky, something. So far in their relatively new acquaintance, Hannibal's one of the only people in his life who doesn't seem to want something more than he has to give. He doesn't want to make it weird. Especially not when they're about to spend an hour and a half in the car together.

Hannibal's car accelerates down the driveway and away from Will's house, and Will finds himself looking back at it forlornly. He'd like to be in there, with his dogs and his books, not on his way to one variant on what Hell custom-designed for him might look like.

Eventually he faces forward and settles into his seat, at least grateful that Hannibal's car is comfortable and has plenty of leg room for the drive. "Thanks again for doing this," he offers. "I promise I am never again letting Bev trap me into anything this stupid, this is a one-time-only rescue mission."

Hannibal makes a little soft humming sound, one Will knows by now to take for amusement. He's never had a therapist before who openly found him so *amusing* and he occasionally wonders whether Hannibal's like this with all his patients or if Will's just that uniquely and interestingly broken. Whatever it is, Hannibal's being a good sport about this whole mess and answers, "It's my pleasure. You're not the only one who could use an evening away from routine."

"I find it hard to believe going to any reunion at all, much less someone else's, is anyone's idea of a pleasure."

He can see Hannibal's shrug out of the corner of his eye even though he's watching the road sliding away in front of them. "I'm expecting it to be an educational experience. I've never been to a reunion. The occasional alumni event from my graduate program, but I spent much of my youth in a boarding school in Paris. I believe they do have some equivalent of reunions, but it's a long way to go for such a thing. I've never bothered."

Will grabs at that; he's been afraid they'd spend the whole car ride probing into his own teenage years and he'd rather keep Hannibal talking. That line - friend, therapist, colleague - continues to be blurry and he'd like to keep on the friend side this evening. Doesn't feel like having Hannibal poking around behind his eyes. "I feel like a French high school reunion

would almost have to be better. Less terrible pop music, more champagne, better food. Next time you get invited to one of those, let's go there instead." It's not until the words are out of his mouth that he realizes he was in such a hurry to keep the topic away from himself that it came out badly, some weird combination of awkwardness and unintended flirtation.

He slinks down lower in seat and wishes briefly for death, a sinkhole to swallow him up, a meteor hurtling from the sky, something. So far in their relatively new acquaintance, Hannibal's one of the only people in his life who doesn't seem to want something more than he has to give. He doesn't want to make it weird. Especially not when they're about to spend an hour and a half in the car together.

To his relief, there's just that little hint of amusement again, but it doesn't get weird. Instead Hannibal just talks for a while, telling Will stories about his boarding school and about Paris, until some of the tension erases itself from Will's frame and he stops wishing to be put out of his misery by a spontaneous aneurysm of some sort.

Eventually conversation trails off to a mostly comfortable silence and Hannibal turns on the radio. He gives Will free rein over the satellite controls, with the caveat that he is not to put on anything that Jimmy Price would listen to. Will fiddles with the controls for a bit until he settles on a blues station, and then sits back with his eyes closed to listen while the music wraps him up in memories.

After a while he's startled by the blast of "Foxy Lady", grimaces, and pats down his pockets, avoiding Hannibal's curious glance while explaining, "Bev also won the right to reprogram my ringtones for a month. I hate her." He hopes Hannibal doesn't ask what his own ringtone on Will's phone is now. Bev reprogrammed it when he visited her earlier that day.

"Yes, Bev? Have you by any chance reconsidered this terrible idea of yours?"

"No way. This is the best idea I've ever had." Even sounding wrung out from whatever virus she's got, Bev's irritatingly perky. "Are you there yet?"

"We're in the car. How are you feeling?"

"Eh. I think I'm going to live. At least as long as you keep giving me things to live for. Did he dress up? Did you? Did he bring you a corsage?"

"*Jesus,* Beverly." He hisses the words out and switches the phone to his right ear, as far away from Hannibal as possible, hoping he didn't hear that. "It's not like that, and that's not even a thing if it were. It's a reunion, not a prom. Listen, do you want something or are you just calling to harass me?"

"I want a picture. Send me a car selfie, get Lecter in it, and I promise to leave you alone for at least two hours. So you can have some quality time with your date and enjoy your cherished high school memories."

"Enjoy this while it lasts, Katz. I am never playing cards with you again." He stabs the button to end the call with unnecessary force and then pulls up the camera on his phone. It takes a moment to remember how to reverse the direction; Will doesn't exactly take a lot of selfies.

Hannibal's eyes are on the road, his hands resting casually on the wheel, and Will can't get a read on how much of that he overheard as he asks solicitously how Beverly is feeling.

"Better, it sounds like. Which is almost a pity, she deserves to suffer a bit more. Look, I'm sorry, but she's making me send her a picture. Probably the first of many. I did warn you."

Hannibal shrugs agreeably but Will sees his eyes flicker up to the rearview mirror. Checking his hair. He represses a grin at that; it's good to be reminded Hannibal's as human, as vain, as anyone else. Easier to keep him on the friend side of the line that way.

Will twists awkwardly in his seat and manages to find an angle from which he can get himself in the picture as well as Hannibal's profile. He glares at the camera as hard as he possibly can and takes the picture. It's a little blurry but it will do. He looks unbelievably annoyed. Hannibal's smiling out at the road like he's a little kid on his way to Disneyland. He's pretty sure he's going to find this picture blown up full size and framed on Bev's desk next week.

He texts the picture and all but growls at the little stream of smiley faces and hearts she sends back. This is why he doesn't make friends with colleagues. He's going to strangle her when he gets back, if he survives the night.

He shoves the phone back into his pocket and slams his head back against the back of the seat. After a moment, before he realizes he's going to make the request, he asks, "Can we find somewhere to stop off for a drink first? I think I lack the strength to go into this sober."

"Whatever you wish, Will. It's your evening. I'm just along for company. But I'm happy to play designated driver as well. Did you have anywhere in mind?"

"I don't care. You're pickier about these things than I am. Just find somewhere. I'm going to sit here for a while and plan elaborate revenge plots. Are you any good at revenge?"

Hannibal smiles again, an odd twist of an expression that Will can't fully read, and turns off the highway.

# Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal's collected again now, eyes steady on the road, pondering this new piece of the puzzle that is Will. An unexpected and promising fluidity in Will. An unexpected and discomfiting sting to hear that Hannibal himself is not Will's type, whatever that may be. He's been telling himself his interest in the profiler doesn't lie in that particular direction, but it's a blow to the ego nonetheless. And inconvenient to find that he cares enough to feel that blow.

Hannibal hangs a few steps behind as they exit the bar, watching Will's gait. After three drinks he's not *drunk*, not so much it's an issue, but he moves differently. Loose-limbed, more free with his gestures, not quite as resistant to eye contact. It's an interesting contrast to the tension that usually winds him tight at crime scenes and some of their sessions. He's beginning to see how this version of Will, with a few more drinks in him and a need to blow off steam after a tough crime scene, might turn into someone who would engage in ill-advised poker games with Katz, Price, and Zeller.

Will's tongue loosens a bit, too. Hannibal has managed to drag a little more backstory out of Will in the gloom of the bar. A better understanding of his childhood, the frequent moves, the semi-benign neglect - an awkward little boy left to his own devices too often, turning to the worlds in his head and the stories he could intuit about other lives when his own left him wanting.

It's not far off from what Hannibal had already surmised, but useful to hear it directly from Will. Useful to see his gaze turn distant, useful to scent the anger buried leagues deep under the surface, so far down Will may not even realize how deep the vein runs. This trip has already been worthwhile even if this is all the information Hannibal gets from it.

Will drops back into the passenger seat and turns the music up as they head back for the highway. "Okay. I'm as ready for this thing as I'm going to be. Let's get this over with."

They drive in comfortable silence for several miles before Hannibal breaks it with: "We haven't discussed how you wish me to be identified once we arrive. Not your doctor, clearly. Colleague?"

Will shrugs, a relaxed wriggle of a motion lubricated by his light buzz. "Let's go with friend. Friend is less weird."

"That may lead to certain assumptions."

“We can correct the assumptions if they arise.” Hannibal’s fine with that, content that he has the situation in hand, complacent enough that he almost drives straight off the road when Will goes on in the same casual tone: “The assumptions would have been made anyway. There were rumors, with a certain amount of truth behind them. No one’s going to be surprised at me bringing a man with me. Although you in *particular* may be a surprise. You’re not exactly my type.”

It’s tribute to years of practice at schooling his responses that Hannibal does not, in fact, drive off the road or do much of anything other than flick the briefest of glances over to Will and then back to the road. “You’ve never suggested any inclinations in that direction.”

“My inclinations have a variety of directions. But you’ve never asked and it’s never been relevant to the things we discuss.”

“Fair enough.” Hannibal’s collected again now, eyes steady on the road, pondering this new piece of the puzzle that is Will. An unexpected and promising fluidity in Will. An unexpected and discomfiting sting to hear that Hannibal himself is not Will’s *type*, whatever that may be. He’s been telling himself his interest in the profiler doesn’t lie in that particular direction, but it’s a blow to the ego nonetheless. And inconvenient to find that he cares enough to feel that blow. “It’s your private business and none of mine unless you wish to share, Will. Or unless it’s causing you problems you wish to discuss.”

They’re nearing their destination and Hannibal tries to juggle getting off the highway with an appropriate response. He doesn’t usually have trouble holding two trains of thought at once but he’s a little thrown at the moment. It’s not so much the new information as the ease with which it’s shared, when it usually takes so much work to drag any glimpse of Will’s interior life out of the man. He makes a note that he should perhaps start dispensing from the liquor cabinet during their sessions, as it seems to work wonders.

“I’m not saying anyone’s been spending twenty years lying awake at night wondering whether I turned out gay. I’ll be surprised if anyone remembers me at all. I’m just saying if anyone does, it’s not going to shake their worldview when I show up with you. Turn right up ahead, by the way. We’re almost there.”

Will directs them through a series of side streets and there’s no time to steer the conversation back where it had been going. They find themselves at the high school, a nondescript example of the species, perhaps a bit on the crumbling side. There are lights and a banner and the low repetitive thud of music that they can’t quite hear with the doors closed, but which promises to be something terrible. There are a few people outside smoking or perhaps just hiding, none of whom seem particularly interested in them.

They get out of the car and Will leans up against it, resting forearms on the roof as he looks over it at Hannibal. Hannibal was about to turn and head toward the school, but he’s caught by a glint in Will’s eyes, the continued unfamiliar ease in his frame as he leans on the car.

He asks, “Is something wrong?”

Will studies him for a moment before responding. “I’m feeling like an ass. That thing about my *type*. It came out sounding worse than I meant it. I’m nervous and defensive and it makes

me sound like an asshole and it's really nice of you to come here with me tonight. So. I'm sorry. I'm making this weird and I didn't mean to."

Hannibal smiles in spite of the faint continued sting. He's more amused by Will's newfound ability to express himself than he is injured by the results. "Honesty isn't something to be apologized for. It's fine. Some other day I would like to explore how much more forthcoming you are under the influence, but this doesn't seem like the time. Shall we go inside?"

Will casts a glance toward the building and then nods "Yeah. Let's get this over with before I sober up."

They move together toward the school, long loping strides across the grass.

Inside there's a welcoming committee, chipper and vaguely confused, unsure if they remember Will, definitely not remembering Hannibal. Will identifies himself and gets a name tag, barely manages to contain an eye roll as he plasters it on his shirt. There's a bit of confusion about Hannibal; they were expecting Will to show up with a Beverly, and whatever Hannibal is, he doesn't look like a Beverly.

Hannibal is excruciatingly polite about the mix-up, and accepts a freshly hand-written name tag. Will palms Beverly's tag as well when no one's looking; Hannibal admires how smoothly it's done.

Before they enter the gym where the main festivities appear to be going on, they pause to document the moment for Beverly, sending her a picture of Hannibal wearing her nametag framed against a cheerful banner. Will grimly ignores his pocket when it immediately begins buzzing with a stream of responses and mutters something profane about his revenge plans.

He takes a deep breath and they head into the noise and lights and commotion, an assault of terrible taste that Hannibal might recoil from if he weren't so busy watching to see what Will does with it.

What Will does with it is glance around the room exactly long enough to find the bar, and then to barrel toward it as fast as he can do so without attracting attention. Hannibal follows along behind knowing he probably should suggest Will slow it down a little. He doesn't suggest any such thing.

# Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

> Apparently he's Guilty Asshole Drunk. That particular stage when he's too buzzed to remember that most of his internal monologue is socially unacceptable and should be repressed, but sober enough to feel guilty about things once he's said them. It's too late to try not being an asshole, so he may as well go the other way and get so drunk he doesn't care that he's an asshole. He flags down the bartender and orders a double. At least there's a bar.

Will can feel himself sobering up and that's no good. That raises the possibility that he might start *thinking* again: about being back in high school, about all the ways he's going to get back at Beverly, and about the asshole thing he just said to Hannibal.

Apparently he's Guilty Asshole Drunk. That particular stage when he's too buzzed to remember that most of his internal monologue is socially unacceptable and should be repressed, but sober enough to feel guilty about things once he's said them. It's too late to try *not* being an asshole, so he may as well go the other way and get so drunk he doesn't care that he's an asshole. He flags down the bartender and orders a double. At least there's a bar.

Hannibal catches up with him a few moments later and draws him off to the side, away from the crowded bar, once he has his drink in hand.

Will does his best to fade into the background, and tries to get his bearings. They're set up in the large gymnasium, which he remembers only vaguely, not having been a terribly athletic type. There's the bar, and a buffet and tables, and a space cleared for dancing that contains only a few brave or idiotic fools at the moment. There are some displays set up, photos and yearbooks and mementos. Wilted streamers. He doesn't precisely recognize the song playing and yet it fills him with a vague sense memory of scratchy ill-fitting clothes, cafeteria lunches, and dread. It's all incredibly depressing and precisely what he expected.

He startles when someone comes up to him and resists the ridiculous urge to hide behind Hannibal. He peers at her nametag instead while she introduces herself as Debbie, from physics class. He doesn't remember Debbie. He barely remembers physics class. He stumbles through an awkward catching-up chat until Hannibal steps in smoothly just as Will is painfully explaining that he's a teacher now.

Hannibal chimes in brightly, "And an author! He's quite well published in his field. Will wrote the standard monograph on time of death from insect activity. I'm his friend. Hannibal." He offers a hand. Debbie's eyes flicker between them and an *oh* forms on her lips but goes unspoken. She says something about not knowing his writing, Will says something

about how she wouldn't unless she reads journals about decomposition for fun and then he laughs and the whole thing is terrible and he slams the rest of his drink as soon as she's gone.

"Hannibal." He doesn't mean to sound annoyed, he's more anxious than anything else, but it comes out snappish because he's still Guilty Asshole Drunk. "I appreciate you being complimentary about my work but I assure you, no one here cares about maggot activity. No one is going to be impressed that I can think like a monster."

"I am." The sincerity in Hannibal's tone makes Will laugh in spite of himself and the whole stupid situation.

"You may be the only person in this room who's stranger than I am. Come on. I want a refill, and then let's go see if I'm anywhere in those depressing displays. Might as well give Bev a vicarious thrill if we can. Since we're here."

He slides back over to the bartender, welcomes the burn of another drink. It's terrible, stinging on the way down his throat, no subtlety to it at all. It's fine. It's getting the job done. He's already all but forgotten about what's-her-face from physics class. He's on his way out of Guilty Asshole Drunk and heading for Unrepentant Asshole Drunk, which seems like a better place to be on this particular night.

He tugs Hannibal by the arm over toward the display tables and sets to peering at the pictures. Hannibal starts in with the club photos but Will shakes his head impatiently. "I wouldn't bother. It may shock you to learn that I was not a *joiner*." He snickers a little, remembering. "Every report card I ever had in a dozen schools said 'William doesn't play well with others.' I bet you got a few of those too, huh?" He doesn't know where the insight comes from, hasn't really thought about Hannibal's youth, but he suddenly knows that Hannibal was a solitary boy in that boarding school of his.

Hannibal leaves that photo display behind and steps closer with a smile that looks more like a baring of teeth. "We are alike in that way, yes. I was not precisely a joiner either. I had a tutor as a child and once I was in school, I preferred the company of my elders to my peers. I found children my own age to be unsatisfying. I still do, for the most part." He looks like he's considering saying something else, then turns back to the tables. "So where might we find you, then?"

"Hell if I know. If I'm here at all it's probably in the background of someone else's photo…" Will scans through the photos rapidly looking for his own dark curls, longer and unkempt as he'd worn them that year.

"There, I think." Hannibal reaches out one finger and taps a candid photo. It's some group of cheerful, clean-cut teenagers, and in the background leaning against a wall, a too-thin boy, hair obscuring most of his face,the set of his shoulders vaguely angry. Slightly feral.

Will recognizes himself but isn't sure how anyone else would. He's practically a smudge in the background. "How can you even tell? I'm barely in that one."

Hannibal shrugs elegantly. "Your posture. You look like that when you're uncomfortable. You looked like that the first day I saw you in Jack's office. As if you were considering

punching me for daring to see you."

"I felt cornered."

"In the picture or in Jack's office?"

"Both, probably." Will blinks and glances sharply at Hannibal. "Are we having a session right now? I'm getting another drink if you're going to try to psychoanalyze me at my own reunion."

"I apologize." Hannibal sounds like he means it.

Will tenses. Uncomfortable again. He's probably doing that same thing with his shoulders. "Fuck it. I'm getting one anyway. Stay here and try not to tell anyone I could think of six ways someone might murder them with the centerpieces alone, or I'll never win Mr. Congeniality."

Hannibal's giving him an odd look at that, an almost delighted look, as if maybe Hannibal *likes* him set to Unrepentant Asshole Drunk. That would be a first. He heads back to the bar and gets stopped a couple of times along the way. One person he vaguely recognizes, one person he's pretty sure he's never seen in his life, both acting as if they're on a mission to check every person on the room off from their personal greeting list, like he's an item to be collected in a scavenger hunt. He gets out of the conversations as fast as he can.

One more drink. He tosses it back and can almost feel it hit his bloodstream too fast, and he instantly knows that was one drink too far. Oh, well. Too late now.

He makes his way back to where Hannibal is having a conversation with a blond man in a suit one size too tight, a bit slicked back, a bit smarmy looking. He's almost sure he sees Hannibal take a business card from the man as he nears them but by the time he reaches them the man's already gone.

"What was that about?"

Hannibal pats at his pocket where the card lies. "Trying to drum up partners for what sounds like a very shaky business deal. I wouldn't have minded but he was rather rude about my lack of interest." He watches the man thoughtfully for a moment and then seems to shake off some consideration and return to Will. "I think I found one more of you, a bit more suited for Ms. Katz."

"Oh, God. What is it?"

"Senior photograph, I believe." Hannibal gestures and Will sighs, but leans in to look at the display of senior photos.

He'd gotten a haircut for photo day, he remembers that - hadn't particularly wanted to but it hadn't been worth a fight with his father, who had been in one of his brief 'involved parent' phases after yet another letter home about Will's demeanor. He looks like a shorn sheep in the photo, uncomfortable being so visible without the armor of his curls to hide behind. Less

angry, more breakable. He'd worn his best shirt, and he's sure Hannibal's clever eyes are picking out the worn collar, the slightly frayed sleeves, the mismatched button. The best Will had owned that year had not been very good.

He looks away, not wanting to remember anything else, not wanting to know what else Hannibal can intuit from that picture. "You can send that one to her yourself if you absolutely have to. I always hated it."

Hannibal eyes him but doesn't say anything, he just snaps the photo himself, gets Bev's number from Will, and sends it off. It occurs to Will a moment too late that giving Bev direct access to Hannibal may not have been the best move, the way she's insisting on playing this up as a "date," but it's too late. He watches Hannibal's phone buzz, watches him read the response and sees the tiniest shadow of a smile flicker across Hannibal's mouth, its corners quirking just slightly.

He resists the urge to lunge for the phone and find out what they're saying. He tries not to twitch when Hannibal begins to tap out a response, a little slowly as if he's not used to texting much.

They're *talking about him* and it's his own fault and watching it is going to drive him crazy. So he takes a deep breath, wobbles slightly, reminds himself that he is ostensibly here to experience social interaction with normal people and not just to walk the more uncomfortable parts of memory lane with Hannibal, and he turns away and heads over toward the buffet. A little food to chase the whiskey would be a very good idea. And maybe he can find someone to be socially normal with in line.

He determinedly does not look back to see whether Hannibal's even noticed he's gone, but his lips tighten as he hears another buzz.

# Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

> Apparently one of his clients is having an after-hours emergency. Better tonight than when he's knee-deep in removing organs, but he's still annoyed.
>
> He moves swiftly toward the door and out onto the grass to take the call. It's Franklyn, and Hannibal briefly considers walking right back inside and dropping the phone into the punch bowl. Or running it over with his car. Or just flinging it into the night as far as his aim can reach.

Hannibal keeps busy for a while on his phone, leaving Will to his own devices. He doesn't actually have anything much to say to Beverly. He wishes her a speedy recovery, knowing perfectly well that she'll be feeling fine in another day or so. And whatever her tendency to tweak Will long-distance may be, she restrains herself with him. She does suggest he send her any more amusing photos that he comes across, and then they end their brief conversation. But it amuses Hannibal to know that it's annoying Will, so he taps away for a few minutes longer and lets Will imagine whatever he wants.

When he looks up again, Will has made his way over to what seems to be passing as "dinner." He's just as glad that he ate well before leaving the house, as nothing on offer here looks edible. But it's probably a good idea for Will to eat. There's "interestingly and entertainingly inebriated" and there's "so drunk he falls over and has to be carted bodily out of the high school" and Hannibal would rather keep Will on the conscious side of that line.

Hannibal turns back to the displays of faintly cloying nostalgia and peruses them a bit longer for any more hints of Will's youth. There doesn't seem to be anything, between Will's brief tenure at the school and his not-a-joiner status. Hannibal's not particularly surprised. No one gets as isolated as Will Graham overnight. That requires a *process*, one that neither began nor ended in this building.

As he's musing on that there's a buzz in his pocket. Beverly again, presumably. She's getting a little pushy. He's mildly annoyed as he checks the phone, but it turns out to be his after-hours emergency answering service instead. He considers trying to wave some sort of notice to Will that he needs to step out, but when he looks over Will has found a table and apparently a person or two to talk to. He's gesticulating animatedly and Hannibal would love to know why, but apparently one of his clients is having an after-hours emergency. Better tonight than when he's knee-deep in removing organs, but he's still annoyed.

He moves swiftly toward the door and out onto the grass to take the call. It's Franklyn, and Hannibal briefly considers walking right back inside and dropping the phone into the punch

bowl. Or running it over with his car. Or just flinging it into the night as far as his aim can reach.

Instead he puts on his best calm and nonresponsive demeanor and listens for long enough to ascertain that Franklyn is not having an actual emergency. He reminds Franklyn, not for the first time, what the parameters of an actual emergency are, and that outside of those parameters he needs to cultivate some better methods of working through difficult moments that do not include inappropriate abuse of emergency contact methods. He suggests they discuss it further at their next appointment. He is polite and professional, and he spends the entire conversation visualizing disembowelling his patient and turning him into a feast for Will Graham's dogs. It's mostly an idle fantasy; Hannibal tries not to make a habit of preying on his own patients. But some of them make it more difficult than others to remember the reasoning for that.

After ending the call he lingers outside for a few moments, enjoying the relative cool and quiet before returning to the banality waiting inside. It's while he's still enjoying the dark of the evening that a member of the welcoming committee comes outside looking for him, fluttering and apprehensive. "Excuse me." She taps at his shoulder and he manages not to make a face at the contact, as she eyes his nametag to remember what to call him. "Mr. Lecter. You're here with Will Graham, aren't you?"

"Yes. I believe he's inside, if you're looking for him."

"No. I, well, we're looking for you. Could you come in? It's just that, you see, there've been some complaints."

Perhaps he's lingered outside too long. He tries to imagine what the problem could be and imagination fails; he's fairly certain that whatever Will is doing, it's not dancing on tables or gratuitous sexual harassment or fistfighting or any of the other typical or expected ways to make trouble at a reunion. "What does the problem seem to be?"

Her eyes dart as if she's looking for someone to rescue her from this conversation but there's no one there. "It's probably best if you come in. He's, it's just, he's telling these stories that are upsetting some of our guests. About his work? Rather...loudly?"

Hannibal represses the urge to smile, as he represses so many things. "I see. Of course. I'll be right in."

He gets the gist of what's going on but he isn't fully prepared for what he's walking into and he does smile, just a little, when he enters the room. Will isn't just telling stories. Will is *lecturing*, as he does so well. Someone made the mistake of finding out just enough about what Will does to ask a probably-innocent question about some high-profile case or another, and Will had enough to drink that he's not making good choices and he's not as averse to social interaction as usual, and one thing led to another and now Will is lecturing. He's probably given exactly this lecture at the Academy, actually. Hannibal thinks he may have heard parts of it before.

Hannibal hangs back for a moment despite the fluttering presence of the welcoming committee at his elbow, enjoying the scene. Will's pacing near the dining tables, not entirely

unlike he would in a classroom but with wilder arm gestures and a less modulated tone. He's gathered a small crowd of interested-looking people who are either fascinated by the macabre stories that a criminal profiler can tell them, or perhaps who are just drawn to the potential trainwreck. He's likewise gathered a group of people standing far away in a knot, muttering and looking horrified as Will throws around terms like *blood spray* and *sadist* and *latent fingerprints taken from corneas* and *skin cells under the victim's fingernails.*

The music's still going on but no one's dancing. The staff manning the buffet tables look vaguely ill. It's marvelous.

Hannibal is utterly delighted. He wonders if he can hold back the naysayers for long enough that Will might get around to sharing his current thoughts about the Chesapeake Ripper.

Sadly, that doesn't seem to be a possibility. There's a tug at his sleeve again and a hissed "*Please*, Mr. Lecter. Can you make him stop?"

He corrects her: "Dr. Lecter." He doesn't otherwise bother to respond, but he does regretfully head over toward Will's impromptu lecture hall. He steps between Will and his audience and captures Will's elbow, moving in close to keep his voice low.

"Will. I'd love to hear more on your theories but this isn't the normal social interaction we were speaking of for this evening. This isn't the place for this."

Will's impatient, glaring at him heatedly, shaking off his hand. "That guy over there asked about Garret Jacob Hobbs, he had it all wrong, he's been reading all sorts of nonsense in the papers--"

"*Will*." Hannibal's acutely aware that their audience is paying attention to all of this and that any one of them could decide to call up Freddie Lounds or one of her equivalents with the story of Will launching into a drunken rant at their reunion. He hadn't intended the evening to have any permanent repercussions and decides swiftly to get Will out of the room before it can. "I understand. But this isn't the place. Will you come outside with me so we can talk it over?"

He sees Will struggle with that, frustrated, reeking with alcohol and anxiety and his own fevered brain. He thinks *stubborn boy* but doesn't say it. He takes Will's arm again and steers him toward the door and this time Will goes along with it, annoyed but following. Murmurs follow them. The welcoming committee woman wilts in relief.

Once Hannibal gets Will out of the school and into the open air, it gets easier. The fresh air seems to bring Will around a bit. He sags against a wall and rubs a hand over his eyes and groans. "Bev. I am going to kill her. I am going to kill her with my *bare hands* and then...and then…" He runs out of steam suddenly, apparently too tired to think of the rest of that threat. He blinks up at Hannibal like he's just realized he's there. "Shit. Can we leave? I don't think I want to go back in there."

Hannibal refrains from pointing out that he's pretty sure they can't go back in there without being promptly escorted out. No point rubbing salt in the wound. "I think I've had a thorough

enough educational experience for the evening. Have we satisfied the terms of your wager sufficiently?"

"I don't care if we have or not. I'm never setting foot in that building again. Everyone in there is awful. Let's *go*, Hannibal."

He escorts Will to the car and suppresses any hint of mirth as Will struggles with the seatbelt buckle for a moment before it clicks into place. He lets Will turn his blues back on, and they pull out of the parking lot and away from the school.

Before they even reach the highway Will is out, fast asleep despite all his protestations that he never sleeps, head pressed up against the window, open-mouthed and letting out the tinest of snores. He doesn't flinch or stir when the phone in his pocket starts blaring "Foxy Lady" again, Beverly calling in for an update.

Hannibal ponders this for a moment and decides, perhaps for reasons of his own or perhaps to ensure Will's wager terms have been adequately met, that a final update for Beverly is in order. He pulls off the road and parks as gently as he can, and Will doesn't move. The phone has fallen silent by now, Beverly's call unanswered.

Hannibal pulls out his own phone and snaps a final photograph of Will dead to the world in the passenger seat. He sends it off to Beverly with a message: *Will is unable to answer your call right now. He has perhaps overindulged slightly.*

He waits patiently for a return message and it comes quickly, Beverly stuck home in bed and bored. *I should have warned you he's a lightweight. You'll get him home?*

*I'll ensure he's tucked in safe and sound, Ms. Katz.*

There's a little pause there and Hannibal's fairly sure Beverly is deciding whether her relationship with Hannibal is open to the level of teasing he overheard her indulging in with Will earlier. He can just imagine the comments she's thinking of making, may perhaps have intentionally tempted her to make them.

In the end she seems to decide against it. *Good. Drive safe. Thanks for being my stand-in. I expect all the details next week.*

*It was my pleasure entirely. Have a good night.*

He puts the phone away and pulls back onto the road and onto the highway, headlights cutting through the night, entirely pleased with the evening's events, leaving Will's music on low to soothe and gentle his dreams.

# Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

> He lets Hannibal help him out of the car and catches an expression on his face in the semi-darkness that's all eyes and teeth. The sight drifts through his mind and catches itself on a memory, a vague recollection of a favorite childhood book, a sing-song rhyme: *I'll eat you up, I love you so*. He shakes his head to clear his mind and the thought floats away, out of reach where he won't recall it in the morning or in fact for several years to come.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will surfaces slowly, like fighting up through quicksand, back into the world. It takes a minute to reorient - neck cramp, seatbelt strap biting into his cheek, Lucinda Williams oozing heartbreak through the car speakers. He sits straighter with a groan, blinking around to get his bearings. His head's fuzzy. His mouth tastes fuzzy. Everything's fuzzy.

Hannibal glances over at him, then back to the road, before offering a cheerful, "We're not quite to Wolf Trap yet. You have time to rest a little more, if you like. You look as if you may need it."

"I need to brush my teeth. And sleep for a year. And never leave my house again."

"That would be a shame. Ms. Katz informs me she is anxiously awaiting your report on your weekend."

Will mumbles about exactly what Ms. Katz can do to herself while she's waiting, and then slumps back down. The cool window glass feels good against his cheek. It's starting to rain. He considers sticking his head out the window to catch some raindrops, just for a little badly-needed hydration. He realizes he's probably still fairly drunk, if he's considering behaving like one of his dogs in Hannibal's car. Sleep, then. He's less likely to do anything regrettable (anything *else* regrettable) if he sleeps.

"You can change the music if you want." He's not sure if he's said it out loud or just thought it, and it's too late to check, he's already gone as the thought breaks apart half-formed.

He doesn't wake again until the car pulls up outside his house. There's a single light on inside and the sound of the dogs starting to bark at the car, and it feels nice to be home. Safe. He blinks and smiles and fumbles with his seatbelt. By the time he gets it open, Hannibal's already come around to his side of the car and opened the door.

Hannibal tries to take his arm and Will fusses, he's not *that* unsteady or tired. Except maybe he is, or maybe it's just nice to have a friend who looks at him like he's a person and not a collection of clever neurological party tricks. Like he won't break apart if touched.

He lets Hannibal help him out of the car and catches an expression on his face in the semi-darkness that's all eyes and teeth. The sight drifts through his mind and catches itself on a memory, a vague recollection of a favorite childhood book, a sing-song rhyme: *I'll eat you up, I love you so*. He shakes his head to clear his mind and the thought floats away, out of reach where he won't recall it in the morning or in fact for several years to come.

"Thanks. Ugh. Are you completely sorry you agreed to this disaster yet? You could be home doing..." His imagination fails him. "Whatever it is you do when you aren't babysitting your most hopeless patients."

Hannibal makes that little amused sound again as they head toward the house. "I read. I compose. I have other hobbies that get me out of the house fairly often. I chose to spend this evening with a friend instead. I enjoyed myself and even if I hadn't, I believe it's rarely worthwhile to spend time or effort on regret. So no, I'm not sorry. I do think you may be a little sorry in the morning."

"I'm sorry *already*." Will fumbles in his pocket for his housekeys and eases the door open. The dogs spill out on the lawn for their late-night run and he watches them go, sniffing at him and at Hannibal for a moment before heading out into the darkness. "Does your kitchen expertise extend to hangover remedies?"

"Water. Aspirin. Sleep. A good breakfast in the morning. Sometimes the simple recipes are still the best ones."

Will shake his head and steps into the house, leaving the door open. For the dogs, for Hannibal, for whoever wants to come inside. He heads into the bathroom and rummages through the medicine cabinet for painkillers, coming up with some ibuprofen, and when he comes back out Hannibal's made himself comfortable on one of Will's chairs. He doesn't look like he's leaving anytime soon. His coat is probably getting covered with dog hair.

Will pours himself a glass of water and stares vaguely into the refrigerator trying to come up with something that seems even remotely acceptable to offer a guest. It's a pretty sorry sight in there. He settles for pouring a second glass of water for Hannibal.

He sits down and takes the pills and sips the water, and he thinks they start to have a conversation but he realizes after a few minutes that he's nodding off while he sits there, comfortable and tired and relieved to be home. He thinks maybe he says: "I'm sorry, but I have to go to sleep" as he's already halfway across the room. He tries to add, "Can you bring the dogs in before you go?" But it's entirely possible that it all comes out an incoherent mumble, and then he's dropping into bed, facedown in the pillows, and he's gone again.

He may wake up once in the night, to a sound of clattering and water running and a soft yip that sounds like Winston, and Hannibal's voice telling him to go back to sleep. Or maybe that's a dream. Hard to tell, these days. Lines are getting blurry even when he's sober, even when he's awake. If it is a dream, it's at least one that doesn't feature the feathered stag.

When he wakes up for real it's morning, late morning by the look of the sunlight through his windows and directly into his eyes. He seriously considers trying to sleep right on through noon but the dogs have already clued in to the change in his breathing. There's barking and jumping and *oh dear god his head may explode* and he regrets every life choice he's ever made that led to this particular moment.

Only the fact that he does not want to think about the previous evening propels him out of bed. If he's moving, he doesn't have to be thinking. He lets the dogs out. He puts out the dogs' breakfast for when they come back in. He goes for the bottle of ibuprofen again and takes twice the recommended dose. He notices that he's still wearing his reunion nametag, pulls it off, crumples it, and misses wildly as he tries to throw it into the trash can.

Then he sits gazing vaguely into space until he's startled by a blast of music. "Dr. Feelgood." *Damn it, Bev*. She thinks she's much funnier than she is, and Will's only consolation is that Hannibal will never actually know that's his ringtone on Will's phone now, since he wouldn't be calling if he were in the room to hear it.

He finds his jacket and digs out the phone on the third ring. "Hello?"

"Good morning, Will. I apologize if I'm waking you." Hannibal sounds completely unruffled by the evening just past, the fact that Will got them kicked out, slept all the way home, and then basically passed out in mid-conversation. Hannibal's heard worse stories in his professional capacity, no doubt, but Will's still mortified.

"Hannibal. Hey. No, I'm awake, sort of. The dogs woke me up. Thank you for getting them inside last night. I was apparently really tired."

"You needed the rest. How did you sleep? Any sleepwalking?"

Will reflexively checks his feet for scratches or dirt and tries not to think about how weird his life has gotten, that it requires either the question or the reflex. "No, I don't think so. Slept right through."

"Good. I'll let you get on with your day. I just wanted to check that you were feeling all right, and to suggest you check your refrigerator for the last bit of your hangover prescription."

Will wanders to the refrigerator and opens it to find a covered plate he doesn't remember putting there. He pulls it out with the hand that's not holding the phone and uncovers it. Scrambled eggs, sausage, peppers and potatoes. "You made me breakfast while I was asleep?"

"I did tell you it was part of my suggested cure. I had to make do with what you had available, which wasn't much. You should eat better, Will. Having actual food in the house would be a good step in that direction."

He stares dumbly at the plate. "I passed out and you...raided my refrigerator to make me breakfast."

"Taking care of each other is what friends do, I'm told."

Will's almost sure this is not what friends do, and it occurs to him with a slight pang of something that may be affection that Hannibal Lecter, constant center of dinner parties and social events, may actually have no more idea how to be a friend than Will does.

"Thank you. This may actually save my life this morning."

"I'll let you go, then. Will I see you at the usual time this week?"

"Assuming you're still speaking to me, yes. Which you...are, obviously. Sorry. Not really awake here."

"I'll see you then. Thank you again for an educational evening." Hannibal's hung up before Will can figure out the correct response to that. He stares bemused at the plate for a minute, then heats it up and digs in. It's delicious, of course, even though it's more than he ever eats for breakfast, and his stomach feels more settled for having a little food in it.

While he eats he scrolls back through his phone's activity. Bev's been busy since he went incommunicado last night. There are a lot of texts. There are a lot of question marks. She's a little overinvested in whatever she imagines is going on between Will and Hannibal.

He pauses and considers the previous evening for a moment, and finally allows himself a small grin. He takes a picture of his half-eaten breakfast, before letting the dogs share what he's too full to finish.

Then he sends the picture to Bev with a message: *Got home fine. Whole thing as rotten as expected. We are never playing poker again. On the plus side, Hannibal made me breakfast*.

Before she can respond, he turns the phone off and drops it into his coat pocket where he has no intention of checking it again until Monday morning. He's earned some time off from the human race.

Let Bev go as crazy as she wants trying to interpret that message. Maybe he'll explain himself on Monday. Maybe he won't.

Chapter End Notes

And that, my friends, is how a one-sentence Tumblr prompt somehow becomes 9,000 words of only vaguely canon-related nonsense. Thanks for coming along for the ride. I would say "I will return to serious fic soon" but who are we kidding, everything I try to write turns out screwball comedy. So let's just assume I'll be back with more screwball comedy soon, but maybe not quite THIS screwball.

End Notes

I don't understand why my attempts to write one-off nice short crackfic turn into chapters and chapters of overly verbose crackfic instead, but you are all delightful for putting up with it. <3 <3 <3

Feel free to come flail with me at my Tumblr if you want to send me more cracky fic ideas that I can get overly wordy about in the future.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!